

CLARK COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVIEW

POLICY PAPER #1 81/19 Urban/Rural Population Split

DATE: October 3, 2000

BACKGROUND

According to the GMA, the Office of Financial Management is to provide population projections for counties planning under the act to be used for urban areas.

In 1994, it was determined that given the urban/rural development pattern in Clark County, approximately 20% of the county population resided outside urban growth boundaries (UGB's) and approximately 80% resided inside. With the GMA encouraging most growth to occur in urban areas, the county goal was to have a population split that is 81% urban and 19% rural. This was reflected in the population adopted in the plan.

The Hearings Board recognized that property in the rural area of Clark County had experienced an increase in the rate and number of new lots being created. As a result, the remand order directed the county to increase rural lot sizes, indicating that the county arbitrarily allocated a number to the rural area that did not reflect the amount of parcelization that occurred.

The appellate court decision of April, 1999 concluded that 1) "the GMA requires a county to consider OFM population projections when sizing urban growth areas" and 2) "the GMA does not require counties to use OFM's projections as a cap on non-urban growth."

According to the adopted plan, by the year 2012, at least 81 percent of the population should reside inside urban growth areas. No more than nineteen percent should reside outside of urban growth areas.

This split is derived from the plan to change zoning in such a way that the technical outcome of the zoning will result in a population split of 81/19. The population split, as shown in the Comp Plan Table 2.2 depicts the Overall 2012 projected Population (79689 / 416071=19.1% or 19 percent Rural and 81 percent Urban.)

ORIGINAL INTENT

This policy was intended as a way to articulate and monitor the goal for allocation of population inside and outside of urban growth areas. The 81/19 split was seen as achievable given population distribution at the time of plan adoption and population projections for the future.

The policy is 81/19 rather than 80/20 because of arithmetic rounding. The calculations in the plan provide for 80.7% in urban areas and 19.1% in rural areas. The general principle, despite the arithmetic, appears to be an 80/20 split.

The attached table shows the January 1, 1995 population split and progress toward the planning goal since that time.

What issues have come up in discussion of this subject?

The primary issue seems to be the long-term impact of allowing 19 percent of the total population growth to occur in rural areas. At what point has enough growth occurred that the rural area no longer functions as rural? People who ask this question wonder if the split should be restated to reduce, over time, the percent or total amount of growth allowed in rural areas.

A secondary issue seems to relate to tension between communities in the county because the communities, as part of the population allocation process, must accept growth at a level that allows 81 percent of the population to be accommodated inside urban growth boundaries.

A third issue seems to be the use of a measurable standard against which the policy objective of encouraging urban growth can be assessed. One could question, is the “correct” number for urban 79%, 80%, or 81%? Is it more reasonable to encourage rural growth of 16%, 19%, or 21%? Some people expect there to be an objective right or wrong criterion for the policy maker’s decision.

Implications for Change:

Eliminate the population split, resulting in no measurable population split standard.

Implication: The Growth Management Hearings Board would most likely require the county to adopt a standard, either implicitly through a calculation (as occurred in 1994) or explicitly through plan driven land use policies. With a numerical population split standard, the true land use impacts of such a standard are unknown. Plan designations clearly identify the actual number of rural lots the county wishes to achieve and the population may increase, based on person per household, above or below any set population standard.

Consider the population split to be a measurement tool in the Monitoring Report rather than a standard that the county should try to achieve.

Implication: This option would allow the county and cities to measure the rate of growth in the rural and urban areas to determine whether plan policies should be amended to increase or decrease development opportunities in the rural area. In short, the amount of development and the character of the rural area of the county will be determined by the land use designations and the permitted uses within those plan designations, not the population ratio.

Retain the current split of 81/19.

Implication: The policy would be constant through the planning period. The current rural plan designations have finite capacity to accommodate growth. If changes to the rural and resource plan designations become driven by a constant 81/19 population split, it would ultimately result in the rural area becoming urban.

Steering Committee Discussion

There was little discussion of this issue by the Steering Committee. The goal is to encourage about 80 percent of the new growth to occur in the urban areas and about 20 percent in rural areas. It is not necessary to conduct vacant/buildable lands analysis in the rural area in order to identify appropriate rural lot sizes.

Action Taken

Supporting Data

From the Plan Monitoring Report page 13.

Table 1.1.7 Share of Total Population, Urban and Rural

Year	Urban	% Urban	Rural	% Rural	Total
1990	197,457	83%	40,525	17%	237,982
1995	239,368	82%	51,632	18%	291,000
1998	271,388	83%	56,612	17%	328,000
1999	276,840	82%	60,160	18%	337,000
% chng 90-99	40%		48%		42%
Avg. Annual Growth	4.44%		5.33%		4.66%

Source: Washington State Office of Financial Management

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